



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE AND FDA AGENTS ARREST NEW JERSEY MAN FOR ILLEGAL IMPORTATION OF UNAPPROVED FLU VACCINE

Agents seized vaccine before it could get into the U.S. Flu vaccine supply chain.

CHERRY HILL, NJ – Michael J. Garcia, Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); Office of Criminal Investigations for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA); and detectives from the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office announced the arrest of Mahmoud Abuarqoub, 37, of Somers Point, N.J. Abuarqoub was arrested as he entered the country at the Philadelphia International Airport Saturday for the illegal importation of 810 doses of unapproved flu vaccine into the United States.

"This arrest puts an end to Mahmoud Abuarquob's alleged efforts to profit from America's flu vaccine shortage," said Mr. Garcia. "This plot to import unapproved vaccine for sale at grossly inflated prices threatened to put America's flu vaccine supplies at risk. Protecting this country from illegal and potentially dangerous imports is a priority for ICE and the Department of Homeland Security."

A criminal complaint against Abuarqoub filed today in U.S. District Court in Camden alleges that Abuarqoub imported the Aventis Vaxigrip flu vaccine from Saudi Arabia Nov. 17. Abuarqoub, a naturalized United States citizen born in Jordan, had approached a medical professional working at Somers Point Memorial Hospital attempting to sell flu vaccines imported from Europe.

Abuarqoub indicated that he was representing "SAFAD Corporation" and initially offered to sell 20,000 units of Aventis Vaxigrip flu vaccine at \$65 per unit (\$1.3 million total). Abuarqoub displayed copies of a Vaxigrip container and a printout from Aventis to the hospital. The hospital contacted law enforcement instead.

With the hospital cooperating with law enforcement, Abuarqoub agreed that he would sell the hospital 1600 doses of the flu vaccine at a cost of \$55 per unit.

On Nov. 17, ICE agents seized the package containing the vaccine after it arrived at JFK Airport, N.Y. The package was addressed to Abuarqoub at his residence. ICE and FDA agents delivered the package to the address in Somers Point, then executed a search warrant of the residence seizing records and other material related to the investigation.

Abuarqoub was out of the country at the time of the search warrant execution, allegedly arranging for purchase and delivery of additional flu vaccine doses.

Abuarqoub faces up to five years in prison and up to \$10,000 in fines if convicted. Abuarqoub is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Anybody with knowledge of similar attempts to import and distribute unapproved vaccines should contact ICE at 1-866-DHS-2ICE (866-347-2423), or call the FDA at 301-827-6242.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.